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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

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Limited-edition print offer: *Crested Tit, Abernethy by Chris Rose*
Copies of this beautiful signed limited-edition print are available from the SOC. The print is 28 x 43cm with a generous margin for framing. The price is £30, of which 20% is being donated by the artist to the SOC. Please order from Caroline at the Club office and add £3.00 p&p if you would like it posted.

Focusing on the future

For some years, both Council and Management Committees and the SOC membership at AGMs have pondered on the requirements for a new home for Scottish ornithology and the Club. Last year the key decision to move out of 21 Regent Terrace was taken. I started in the new post of Development Manager on the 2nd of November and by the 28th of March this decision had been implemented. Since April 2002 I have been working on the next stage, i.e. finding a new building or site to house a new home for a centre for ornithology for Scotland and the SOC's administration.

Even before joining the Club as an employee, I knew that such a modern centre was required. I had played a significant part in the creation of the Scottish Seabird Centre whose focus, I had hoped, was to provide comprehensive interpretation of Scotland's seabirds, their habitats and, especially, nesting colonies in the Forth. I could see from my own research for the project that there were very few places in Scotland where you could find details about particular bird species. There was really no facility that could provide public access to comprehensive information about all Scotland's birds and their habitats, other than the Library at 21 Regent Terrace, which only opened in office hours.

I was therefore particularly excited and proud when I was given my current job, part of which would be to help create an updated concept of George Waterston's original vision. Internal discussion with the Club's committees made the strategic decision that such a centre would be a resource centre, rather than a public visitor centre. This helped determine which type of site might suit the Club's requirements and the likely size and cost of the development following the sale of 21 Regent Terrace.

It was agreed by Council that a site with year-round birdwatching potential could enable the centre to be open at weekends, as it would attract volunteers. Appeals to the membership from 2000 onwards had yielded relatively few suggestions, which meant that perhaps the search area needed to be expanded beyond the Edinburgh-Stirling-Glasgow triangle.

Given the desire for a site which would appeal to birders all year, a coastal site seemed inevitable, probably on the Forth or Clyde estuaries. The coastal strip from Cramond, eastwards through Musselburgh, Aberlady, Gullane, North Berwick, Tyninghame, Belhaven, Barns Ness, Skateraw and down to St Abbs attracts birders from all over Scotland and from the north of England and beyond. Most of these sites are well serviced by the rapidly improving A1 which will be dualled east to Dunbar within a year.

I consulted SOC Council before writing to six landowners in and around Aberlady and was surprised to get positive responses from three of them. The first prospect was a house very near the Bay, but it was just too small for what we had in mind. The best prospect was the offer of a meeting with the Wemyss and March Estate to look at possible sites on their landholdings near the Bay and in Gosford Estate. After a helpful meeting, a site at the entrance to Aberlady village was identified that overlooked the Bay from an elevated position and met many of our criteria.

This site has a bus stop (from Edinburgh) at its entrance; it is also on the new John Muir Way coastal path and is just a few minutes from the Kilspindie Golf Course road which is used by walkers on the west side of Aberlady Bay. The site is also just a mile from the footbridge into the east side of the Bay.

Aberlady Bay was well watched by the likes of George Waterston, Frank Hamilton and Keith Macgregor (see Keith's article on p. 12) and many other SOC members who still find interesting birds after going there for 50 years!

Initial correspondence with East Lothian Council highlighted the fact that the site would require special consideration as the proposed development was outwith the local plan and is also within the Conservation Area of the village. After a helpful meeting with the planners it was agreed that an application should be submitted along with any supporting points which might justify development in a relatively sensitive area.

At the same time, discussions with the Estate have established a likely guide price for the site which is affordable. At the Management meeting on 7th August 2002 it was proposed that a Property Working Group be re-established. This group will

A view to Gullane Hill over Aberlady Bay, East Lothian, from the proposed new SOC HQ site. Please note that the tide is out! (Bill Gardner)

select the architect and monitor the specifications and progress of the planning application and, hopefully, the progress of the new project.

It is hoped that some external funding can be obtained to help the Club create a national centre for birdwatching resources which can provide useful facilities for birdwatchers and also educational materials which will help bring new people into birding. In order to create a sustainable centre it will be sensible to limit its size so that the main running and maintenance costs can be supported by a large capital sum, hopefully formed from the remainder of the sale proceeds from 21 Regent Terrace, and perhaps some legacies.

What this means in practice is that we should not spend much more than £600,000 on the entire project, including the cost of the land, building costs, landscaping and design/professional fees. As regards fundraising, we should try and raise between £100,000 and £200,000 in external funds if possible.

Although all the signs look very positive for this particular site, it would be wise, for the moment, to continue looking for alternatives, just in case any insurmountable snags are encountered. Members are still invited to suggest sites which might be suitable, just in case. Let's face it; if everything in life was easily predicted it would be boring! However, the Aberlady site is a good one and has many potential benefits which I hope to outline at the AGM and in future editions of *SBN* as the project develops. If you have any suggestions for elements that the centre should include please contact me at HQ. I hope these notes are encouraging and that good progress continues to be made. Watch this space!

Bill Gardner
SOC Development Manager

From the editor's desk

I am sure readers will agree that there is nothing worse than the editor being the main contributor to the publication he or she is editing. The only way to get round this, of course, is for members to submit their own contributions. It is your magazine, after all, and it aims to reflect the diversity of interests and activities within the Club, not just those of the few individuals who have put pen to paper. I am very grateful to everyone who has taken the time to write articles for this issue. They have certainly lightened the gloomy prospect that confronted me when, on agreeing to take on the job of editor for the time being, I found the "Articles for *SBN* 65" folder virtually empty!

How to persuade people to write for the magazine is another matter. There is so much of interest in Scottish birding circles that it should be a question of how do we find space to include everything rather than how are we going to fill the pages this month. I would like to see *SBN* strike a balance between popular birding and accessible science. Most SOC members are amateur birders who simply enjoy their hobby. Many will be active within their local branch, so why not report back on your activities, outings, meetings and interesting birds that you've seen? There is also a great deal of fascinating research undertaken in Scotland, ranging from long-term studies of seabirds to the aerodynamics of House Martins. I am reluctant to approach those professional ornithologists who, when they're not out in the field, spend all their time writing anyway, but I would welcome summaries or reviews so that the results of current research can reach a wider audience.

At this exciting but unpredictable time in the Club's history, *SBN* must keep members up to date with birds and birding in Scotland by recording our activities, opinions and experiences. It should be informative and entertaining in so doing. More contributions - written, photographic and artwork, are required from every level of birder to achieve this.

If all else fails, I will do my best to approach members personally and employ various means to extract articles and illustrations from them. It could be you...

From the editor's window

A new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, incorporating the SOC HQ, is a very exciting prospect. For me, a major consideration in locating the centre must be that it has the highest possible potential for a good "Seen from the Window" list. Birders are lucky in that their interest allows them to make something out of virtually nothing, and patchwatching, even on the scale of looking out of the office window, can make the dullest of working environments more interesting.

The present SOC premises at Musselburgh, whilst functional and comfortable, are sadly lacking in the ornithological department. For a dedicated patchwatcher and sedentary twitcher like myself this is a distinct failing. In the couple of months I have been in and out of the office, my "window list" has struggled to only 15 species, five of them gulls. A number of factors contribute to this less than impressive total. Firstly, I am not always positioned to be able to see out of one of the two windows in the office. Secondly, even if I was, this wouldn't necessarily make much difference as the glass is frosted and the blinds are often lowered to keep out such disagreeable intrusions as daylight. Only when the windows are opened to release the great volume of hot air generated by the industrious staff, can we hope to see any birds. Even when the windows are open, however, the outlook from them is not the most inspiring. Starting from the most distant aspect and working inwards, the view comprises: sky (predominantly grey), the red-brick wall and almost flat corrugated roof of a supermarket, a few straggly shrubs, a wire-mesh fence and, for the 20 metres or so nearest our window, a carpark inhabited by a selection of posh cars, many with personalised number plates. (In case you think that your subscriptions have been put to inappropriate use, please note that SOC staff park their vehicles (if they have one) at the other side of the building).

Some of the larger species of birds on our "window list" have seen fit to decorate the most expensive cars in a way they deem

appropriate, but more often than not the only evidence of local birdlife is the clamour of gulls queuing up on the supermarket roof, ever hopeful of a massive trolley pile-up or a ruptured carrier-bag en route from the fish counter. Being so close to the shore, it is not surprising that Redshank, Curlew and Oystercatcher have made their way onto the list, and these can be detected even through a closed window if they call loudly enough as they fly over. With the window open, I can hear Linnets twittering on a regular basis, the chirps of House Sparrows, an intermittent aerial Greenfinch and the odd Blackbird trying to make himself heard above the muffled roar of traffic. A Dunnock in song was something of a recent highlight, so you can see just how bad it is here.

Of course, some windows are better than others. Back home, my desk is strategically positioned to optimise the view of a corner of our East Lothian garden and the birdtable. I haven't yet got round to adding up the number of species on my "window list", but the likes of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer brighten many an otherwise dull day spent at the computer. More surprising, perhaps, have been Red-legged Partridge, Jay, Lesser Whitethroat, Icterine Warbler and Hawfinch (my best birdtable tick). If I broadened the list to include birds seen from the other window in the room, then I could add Goshawk, Yellow Wagtail, Black Redstart, Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Common Crossbill.

I don't hold out much hope for anything so glamorous from the ground-floor of Harbour Point and, unfortunately, there's not a great deal we can do about it. Given that the owners of the smart cars parked just under the window would probably not welcome a feeding station with its associated birds and their by-products, we have to make do with our sparse selection of urban and marine species. So let's hope the SBRC soon becomes a reality and we can add some more exciting birds to the office list. Having said that, you may not like the thought of the staff spending much of their working day peering hopefully out of the window. But then a happy staff is a productive staff. Honest. And there's nothing that makes the workers happier than a good twitch from their desk. Roll on the Med. Gull on the supermarket roof...

Mike Fraser

The Reluctant Writer

You will notice in *SBN* 64 that there is a request for articles, so when the SOC office staff bludgeoned (they are like that) me to write one, the question was, what could I possibly write about? Birds on the move, from the train (though with the speed and delays of some trains just now that might not be so difficult?). One's favourite bird? What does one like to read in *SBN*? A comment on some or all of these might make an article? Perhaps...

I do not know if anyone has tried birdwatching from the train, but when going to London recently and travelling at about 120mph (luckily keeping to the timetable), I can say it is very difficult. Small birds on telephone wires might be House Sparrows or Chaffinches from their outline and it's certainly a favourite spot for Woodpigeons, which also fly alongside with Swifts, gulls and Carrion Crows. Unfortunately, my seat was between two windows with a large structural divide. This meant I had to crane my neck to see through the window behind to spot any bird that might be coming our way, then try to quickly follow it in the next window as it flew out of sight. There must have been birds amongst the trees and bushes, but these became a green blur. It was possible to see House Martins, Swallows and Starlings near Berwick-on-Tweed station, a Kestrel hovering after that and some Mallards on the River Ouse in Cambridgeshire. On the return journey it was mostly gulls, crows and pigeons again, even from a First Class seat!

One's favourite bird might be influenced by where one is at the time – in the hills or mountains, a Peregrine or Golden Eagle; Dotterel or Ptarmigan on the tops. At the coast – fishing terns, Razorbills and Gannets, waders such as godwits, Snipe and sandpipers, and Ringed Plovers feeding busily on the shore. In woodland – Willow Warblers, Goldcrests, Spotted Flycatchers and Tawny Owls. Elsewhere, Goldfinches, Dippers, Long-tailed and Tufted Ducks, Wigeon and the elegant Smew, Golden Plover and Swifts in flight. And then there are the species seen in other countries – bee-eaters, Hoopoes, rollers, trogons, hummingbirds, motmots (who thought of that name?!) and the elusive Indian Pitta. If I had to put my money on a favourite bird in Scotland, the attractive Long-tailed Tit would get my highest bid, I think.

What do I like to read in *SBN*? What is happening in the SOC, such as any news from Council and, most recently, the developments and move to Musselburgh. Some of the letters can be controversial and amusing, and the book reviews can give fleeting or detailed opinions of what a book is about and if it might be a "good buy". One review of a bird guide certainly caught my eye and I was glad to purchase it on the basis of what I'd read. It is always good to see reports of the unusual, and there are always notices of different happenings. The photographs and artwork are always enjoyable, too.

There are some excellent birding articles; the one by Highland Ringing Group on doing just this in the States (*SBN* 63: 1-2) was most interesting. This was not about Scotland (which some members may prefer), but birds are birds anywhere and knowledge of them can never be dismissed. After all, "our" Ospreys are sometimes here and sometimes in Africa. The killing of migrant birds in Cyprus is certainly relevant to us all. Some of the articles are instructive and their statistics prove a point even if they are a bit daunting for those of us who are not scientifically minded.

Finally, I'm not sure if my own thoughts should be included in *SBN*, but maybe they will encourage others to put pen to paper. The editor awaits!

Sue Goode

Wigeon
(Keith Brockie)

SOC NEWS

Many thanks to all those energetic volunteers who help the Club around the office. We are particularly grateful to the team who packed the bulging envelopes of the June *Scottish Birds*, *Birds of St Kilda* and *SBN* mailing. The stalwart stuffers were: Jill Andrews, Rosemary Davidson, Liz Fraser, Sue Goode, Frank Hamilton, Keith Macgregor and Joan Wilcox.

Nominations for Council

Two nominations for Council have been received. They are Richard Daly and Jimmy Maxwell, both long-standing members of the Club. Their "pen portraits" are given below. Voting for the new member of Council will take place at the AGM at the annual conference.

Richard Daly. A retired CA and group finance director, Richard is currently Vice-chairman and Treasurer of the Central Scotland Branch of the SOC, of which he has been a member for some 27 years. He is also a member of the BTO, RSPB, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the Wildlife Art Society. He began birdwatching in Motherwell when 10 years old. He recalls his first bird through binoculars was a Linnet, confirmed by the *Observer's Book of Birds*!

He is a regular visitor to North America, particularly the Canadian Rockies and New England where, with his wife Avril, he takes to the trails to observe and paint birds and other wildlife. The knowledge acquired over the years has led him to give illustrated talks on the birds and wildlife of the Canadian Rockies.

Having a life-long interest in bird and wildlife art, he returned to his hobby of wildlife painting at the end of his financial career, encouraged by his friend, artist Darren Rees, and by a week spent with John Busby sketching seabirds on the Bass Rock and Craigleith.

Jimmy Maxwell is a retired teacher/lecturer in music. He is married and lives in Hamilton. He has been a member of the SOC (Clyde Branch) for as long as he can remember and has contributed to its publications. He strongly believes in its role as the central agency of ornithological experience, thought and action in Scotland.

He is also a member of the BTO and entirely approves of its recent association with the SOC, e.g. in joint conferences and research. A member of the RSPB, he helped to found the Clyde Area Members Group and has held almost every position on its committee over the last 25 years.

His special interests are birding here and abroad, a Willow Tit project (seven years of conservation and behavioural study), promotion of the RSPB's Baron's Haugh Reserve (including a website updated weekly), and giving talks to a large variety of interest groups. He also enjoys hill-walking, caravanning, sailing, wild flowers and insects, and ensemble playing (violin).

Annual Conference

The Annual Conference and AGM will take place at the Balavil Sports Hotel, Newtonmore, on 1st-3rd November 2002. The programme includes talks on a variety of interesting topics, plus the opportunity for members to hear about progress in the Club's search for a new home and other exciting developments. Full details may be found on the enclosed information leaflet and booking form. We hope as many of you as possible will come to what is always a very lively and enjoyable event.

Regional Committee Meeting

On Sunday 11th August 2002 representatives from 10 of the Club's 14 branches met at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve for the second Regional Committee meeting. Development Manager Bill Gardner and Vice-President Mark Holling also attended. The weather was kinder than it had been in March, but the relentless rain for most of the day limited the birdwatching in what little free time there was available.

Angus Smith in the chair guided us through a busy agenda covering terms of reference for the group, future organisation of the indoor meetings programme, the annual conference and the spring conference held jointly with the BTO, branch website proposals, membership recruitment at branch meetings, branch finances and local projects such as branch hides. Bill gave a short presentation on the proposals for a new HQ and Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre. Significant decisions were made on next year's spring conference and discussions took place about how money is raised at meetings with some new ideas to be documented.

Future meetings will be held in March and August each year. All members are encouraged to speak to their branch representatives to glean more details and to funnel ideas into the group. Those members who do not have a local branch should not be concerned; reaching these members will be the subject of a forthcoming meeting.

Mark Holling

Our Development Manager, Bill Gardner, received his MBE, for services to the Scottish Seabird Centre, from H.R.H. Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, at Holyrood Palace on 2nd July 2002.

SOC Regional Committee Meeting, Vane Farm, 11 Aug 2002. L-R, Standing: Stewart Neilson, Bill Gardner, Angus Smith, Brian Smith, John Wills, Al McNee, James Whitelaw. Sitting: Duncan Watt, Vicky McLellan, Ian Thomson, Joan Howie. (Mark Holling)

St Kilda

As announced in June's *SBN* (64: 17), the SOC is considering chartering Bob Theakston's *Poplar Voyager* from Oban for one or more one-week slots next year to visit St Kilda. The provisional dates can now be confirmed as 24-31 May, 21-28 June and, due to several requests, 9-16 August 2003.

For August, Stuart Murray (well-known expert on the island and author of the *Birds of St Kilda*) adds: "Apart from Guillemots, all the seabirds are still present and I have always found it a good weather month. More importantly, it's the best month for cetaceans. On my last trip in August 2001, we had Great Shearwaters and Common Dolphins around the bows at the same time."

If you are interested in any of these trips, please contact HQ. The cost will be about £800 per person for seven nights full board on the 10-berth *Poplar Voyager*. We will need enough people to show an interest before we can proceed further and finalise any one of the trips. Bookings must be confirmed by the end of October. For more information on the boat, please see www.poplar-charters.co.uk.

St Kilda is a World Heritage Site, renowned for its remarkable landscape, wildlife and history. We are sure that many members will want to take the opportunity to visit this unique and remote part of Scotland.

200 Club

Winners from Oct 2001 to March 2002 were:

Oct **1st** £30 A. Inglis; **2nd** £20 Sylvia Laing; **3rd** £10 Dr J.M. Horobin.

Nov **1st** £150 Dr D.M. Shepherd; **2nd** £75 Mrs M. Draper; **3rd** £50 J. Lamb; **4th** £30 Dr Hissett, **5th** £20 A.D. McNeill; **6th** £10 B Etheridge.

Dec **1st** £50 S.N. Denny; **2nd** £30 JP Martin Bates; **3rd** £20 S. Howe; **4th** £10 Miss M. Spires.

Jan **1st** £30 W.G. Prest; **2nd** £20 I. Balfour Paul; **3rd** £20 Miss S. Stuart.

Feb **1st** £30 Lt Com. Spragge; **2nd** £25 Mrs Ablett; **3rd** £20 Miss S. Stuart; **4th** £10 Mark Holling.

Mar **1st** £50 Mrs Ingham; **2nd** £30 S. Howe; **3rd** £20 R.Tozer; **4th** £10 J. Jackson.

All who joined on 1st June for the 200 Club's fourteenth year are warmly thanked for their continued support which is very gratefully acknowledged by Council. If you are an SOC member and over 18 and would like to join, please contact me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Launch of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

Scotland is home to 13 species of birds of prey and four species of owl which breed regularly. The populations of many of these are significant on a national and international basis. Within the UK, some raptors like Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle and Osprey are almost confined to Scotland. For others, like Hen Harrier and Merlin, Scotland is home to the largest proportion of the UK population. Some species, such as Common Buzzard, are currently increasing in many areas. Eurasian Marsh Harrier is a recent colonist in Scotland; Red Kite is re-establishing itself following re-introduction programmes in three areas of the country. There is evidence of local declines of widespread species such as Common Kestrel and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. We have very little data on the breeding numbers of Long-eared Owls; Eurasian Hobby may become a regular breeding species in the short-term; the enigmatic European Honey Buzzard may be more widespread than we think. We have very little data on wintering numbers or non-breeding populations of most species. Illegal persecution by a small but active minority is a constant threat to most species and continues to restrict the numbers and ranges of several raptors including Hen Harrier, Golden Eagle and Goshawk.

The dramatic and exciting image of raptors draws visitors to Scotland, and for many birdwatchers in Scotland they provide a focus for their activities. There are few who cannot feel that a day's birding is not enlivened by the discovery of one of these spectacular birds. Scotland and its people should be proud of this heritage and promote our raptors and their fortunes to a wider public. To date, the SOC has played a small but consistent role in this promotion and publication of raptor-related information, mainly through its publications.

On 24 June 2002 representatives of seven Scottish conservation and birdwatching organisations, including the SOC, signed an agreement to develop and manage a Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, which will help provide robust information on Scottish raptor populations. Coordinated by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), this cooperation will result in uniform, high standards of data. It will provide a clearer picture of population trends, changes in ranges, and the survival and productivity of raptors. To date, much of this information has been collected and collated by the Scottish Raptor Study Groups and summarised in the Raptor Round-up published by the SOC. The new agreement will enable data from the other organisations to be included in this analysis. The Scheme will allow the coordination of best-practice survey methods and standards, the consistent analysis of data and the wider reporting of findings through a publicly

Launch of Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, Pitlochry, 24 June 2002. L-R: David Stroud (JNCC), Mark Holling (SOC), Malcolm Ogilvie (RBBP), Colin Galbraith (SNH), Patrick Stirling-Aird (SRSG), Stuart Housden (RSPB Scotland), Nick Carter (BTO). (Jon Hardey)

available report. Scotland is leading the way here as no other such coordinated scheme has been set up before. It is expected that the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme will be a model for similar schemes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As well as SNH and SOC, the signatories were Scottish Raptor Study Groups (SRSGs), RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland, Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), and Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The SOC is proud to be asked to participate in this scheme and believes that it has a prominent role both in providing data through the Local Bird Recorder network and disseminating the results through its publications and its 14 branches. We also have a history of organising and participating in national surveys. The responsibilities of the SOC as signed in the agreement are as follows:

"SOC will support and promote national surveys in Scotland, and assist in their organisation if requested. The SOC has access to a wide section of the birdwatching community in Scotland, and the records they collect, some of which may not be known to SRSGs. SOC will, therefore, assist in the provision of relevant data to complete the picture, especially for commoner species. The SOC also has an important role in the dissemination of information about birds of prey (e.g. news about surveys, the results of surveys, summaries of population trends and issues) which it will develop through its publications."

An early action of the group assembled to run the Scheme (on which the SOC is represented) is to appoint a Raptor Monitoring Officer who will be funded by SNH but report to the group. Advertisements for the post were due to be made in late August. An update on activities of the group will be provided in future editions of SBN.

Mark Holling

FROM THE BRANCH NEWSLETTERS

SOC/BTO Conference, Stirling, April 2002

There were about 100 members at the one-day conference, but I was a little disappointed that no one else from Highland made their way down to an excellent day. There were displays from the SOC and the BTO, second-hand books to buy, prints by Derek Robertson, a quiz identifying feathers and wings of 12 Scottish birds and, of course, eight very good presentations/talks.

The first talk was by Liz Humphries about the decline of Kittiwakes on the Isle of May, its demise with the start of the sandeel fishery in 1990 and the subsequent stoppage. Liz radiotracked the birds as they left their nests to go and feed, travelling a minimium of 30km to where the sandeels shoal. Kittiwakes do not change their food supply if there are no sandeels, and so are a very good indicator species to check the sandeel numbers. Liz also mentioned the work done on Wandering Albatrosses and how their numbers are falling, probably due to long-line fishing where lines up to 3km long are set with thousands of baited hooks. The albatrosses take the bait, are hooked and drown. Setting the lines at night might help as the albatrosses feed by day; weighting the lines and other ideas are also being discussed. Satellite transmitters are attached to the albatrosses to see how far the birds range and whether they stop at all. This is very expensive but necessary to track these ocean birds. We were also told that the albatrosses shut down half their brain and lock their shoulder joints to save energy!

Rhys Bullman followed this with a presentation about Redshanks in the Forth Estuary. Icelandic and Scottish birds overwinter and, by looking at strontium isotopes in their bones or feathers, Rhys could work out where the birds were coming from. High levels of strontium come from old rocks such as Scotland,

Wandering Albatross chick. (Mike Fraser)

while lower readings come from the younger rocks of Iceland. The work is expensive but complements ringing and other studies of bird migration.

The third talk was by Jimmy Maxwell who has been studying Willow Tits in Strathclyde for the past five years. There has been a huge decline in England over the past 25 years, with the wee Scottish population just holding on. Jimmy has made special nestboxes for them, colour-ringed the birds and fed them in winter with fat and nuts. He found a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between nest sites, but not many new birds joining the gene pool. The main problem facing the birds seems to be Blue and Great Tits taking over the hole once the Willow Tit has excavated a nesting site. Willow Tits always excavate a new hole and one pair tried five times in one season. Unfortunately, it was too late in the year for it to be successful by the time they had some peace.

Les Hatton then talked about the Black-tailed Godwits that winter on the Eden estuary, where he is warden. The godwits have been on the increase since the 1980s and some stay in the summer. In 1991 Les caught 110 birds, colour-ringed them and decided to study them as they were easy to catch (ha ha!). Ever since, he has managed to catch only a further four birds! However, he assured us that he is perfecting his technique. The majority of the birds stay around the estuary all winter with only a handful going south towards Humberside and none going north past Montrose Basin. Orange rings above the right "knee" are Eden-ringed birds; lime-green rings are Icelandic-ringed birds. Nearly all go to Iceland to breed, with some going across the central belt of Scotland rather than following the coast.

After a splendid three-course lunch, some browsing and a lot of chat with old friends, it was back to the lecture theatre. Chris Wernham gave a talk about the forthcoming Migration Atlas – a précis of the talk that she gave some branches this winter. Then Dawn Balmer told us about another project run by the BTO, the Migration Watch Project. This is where people send information about spring migration arrivals and is only available on the internet. It is fast with rapid feedback, using vast amounts of info and is fun! You have to register on the computer and there are three levels – a short list of 10 common migrants, a longer list and the full list. There are maps etc showing the progress of birds as they spread north, as well as the dates of their arrival on our shores. The website is www.bto.org/ migwatch. If you have access to a computer, do look it up. The project will be running for three years and should give a huge amount of information on bird migration across Britain.

After a short break, Ian Andrews, our Club President, told us about our move from 21 Regent Terrace in Edinburgh after 43 years. The SOC was started in 1936, had its first AGM in 1937 with George Waterston as President, suspended during the war years and then met in Charlotte Square after the war. In 1959, £4000 was given to form a Scottish Centre for Ornithology and 21 Regent Terrace was purchased with Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) owning the building and SOC leasing two rooms, as did the RSPB. In 1986, No. 21 was transferred to the SOC Trustees. In Feb/March 2002 the property was sold and the library packed into 700 boxes in six weeks and moved to premises in Musselburgh with two offices and a store room for the books and journals. The search is now on for a suitable new HQ, preferably with good year-round bird-watching and a hide nearby. This will take time and we will probably be in our temporary accommodation for at least a year. Membership numbers have declined and that is another problem we must overcome.

Jeremy Greenwood, director of the BTO, then outlined plans for their Scottish office, now at Stirling University. He confirmed the close ties with the SOC and did not rule out joining us at our new HQ if suitable. Alan Lauder will not be replaced, but instead they have three permanent posts with back-up from HQ in Thetford. He has great plans for surveys etc and, as usual, his enthusiasm was wonderful.

All in all, it was a good conference, nice to renew friendships with speakers who had been up there in previous years and to meet new people. One of the important reasons for our Club is for members to meet up, exchange sightings and stories and generally spread the pleasure of birdwatching. It is good to see birds, but it is even better to share those sightings with others. We can also compare numbers of different birds like the House Sparrow, so that we can take any action to stop their decline. As a group comprising mainly keen amateurs, we can and must have a say in the conservation of our environment and wildlife. We can educate others, not just youngsters, by showing them the birds through our scopes, talking to them and getting them interested, perhaps by starting off in the garden or on a favourite walk.

Janet Crummy
(*From* Highland Branch Newsletter).

BIRDLINE SCOTLAND

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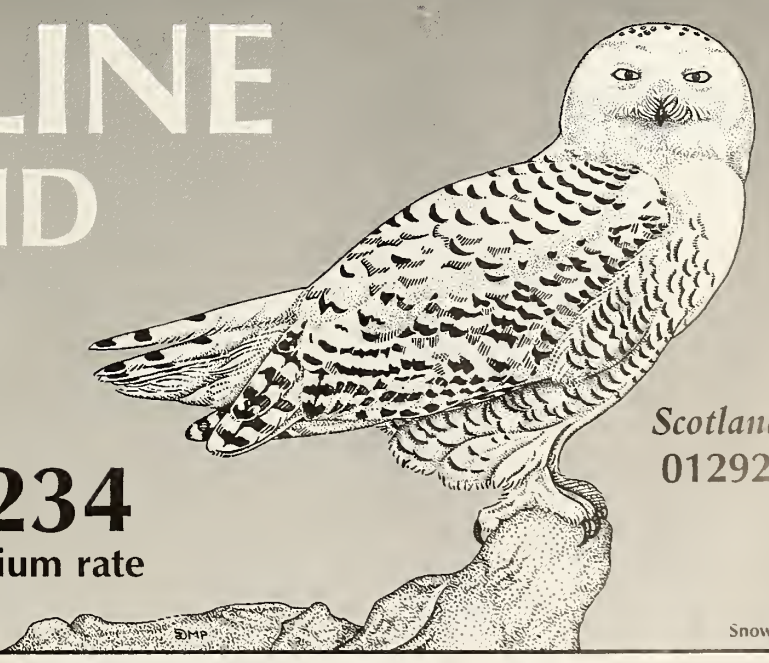

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Snowy Owl *by D. Pullan*

Manx Shearwaters in the Firth of Clyde

2001 produced one of the most memorable years of summer seawatching in the inner Firth of Clyde, mainly due to spectacular numbers of Manx Shearwaters. Virtually unknown in the area until 1988, large numbers of Manxies started to appear in 1989, with a maximum count of 254 north and 434 south past Cloch Point within 1.5 hours on 24 August.

It was John Spooner who first noted the appearance of these birds. Working with the MoD Police, John had a launch patrol area which encompassed the inner Firth as far out as Bute and Arran. During 20 years prior to 1988, he saw only a handful of Manxies.

Since 1990, the trend has been for ever-increasing numbers of shearwaters to come into the Firth of Clyde. One of the best spots to watch them is Cloch Point, which is on the Renfrewshire coast near the town of Gourock. Numbers are variable and rather unpredictable from one year to the next. For example, in 1999 Frances Gatens and I recorded "only" 2,826 bird-days at Cloch, then in the following year a massive total of 14,545 bird-days, mainly during July and August. Last year was even more impressive, with the number of Manx Shearwater sightings in excess of 35,000 bird-days, a record total.

Between 1988 and 1993 a pattern developed. Manxies would appear each year, mainly between mid July and early September. The regular movement would involve them moving north past Cloch Point, heading up the estuary as far as Loch Long and Greenock, then turning around and heading back south again. During these six years no shearwater was ever seen landing on the water or feeding.

Then in 1994 their behaviour changed quite dramatically. There were still the usual movements past the Point, but increasingly flocks began to land on the water, sometimes actively fishing in the company of Gannets. On 30 July that year I had one of my first really memorable days. Not only were there lots of Gannets diving and good numbers of Harbour Porpoises offshore, but also a Basking Shark, only the second record for Renfrewshire.

The evening was calm and warm. Manxies were around in their hundreds, by that time most moving out of the estuary. I counted 2,005 passing south within the course of an hour. By the end of the hour, a large raft of about 1,400 had settled on the water only 200m offshore. With all this activity taking place, it was hard to believe I was in Renfrewshire, not the Western or Northern Isles.

Last summer produced many spectacular days at Cloch Point, with up to 3,000 shearwaters recorded on several occasions. Observers visiting for the first time were pleasantly surprised (some were astonished!) to see how close in the birds could be viewed. Even during fair weather it is not unusual to see small groups pass by as close as 50m, and for flocks of several hundred to land on the sea only 100-200m offshore.

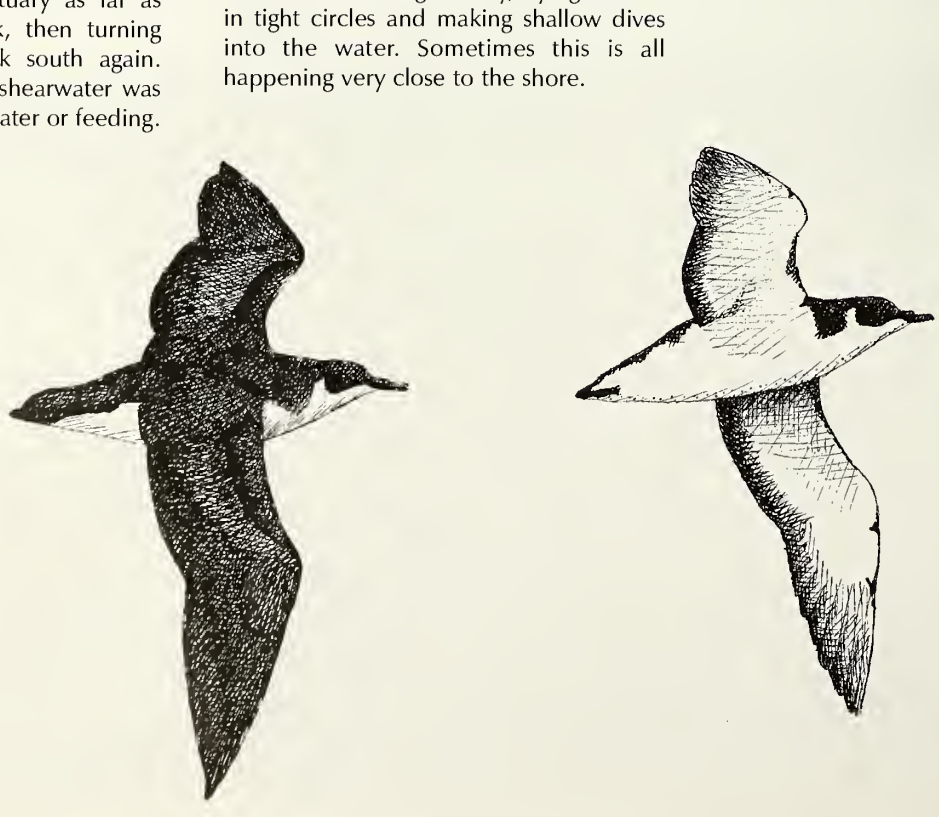
It is also fascinating to watch the shearwaters' feeding behaviour. Large flocks tend to split up and forage over the sea then, usually attracted by diving Gannets or a group of their own kind, they converge from a radius of several kilometres on a shoal of fish. They engage in frenzied feeding activity, flying around in tight circles and making shallow dives into the water. Sometimes this is all happening very close to the shore.

If you haven't been to Cloch Point to see this amazing spectacle, give it a try sometime. The shearwaters can be present any time from late June to early September, but from late July to the end of August is the best period. There is no need to wait for windy conditions – some of the most spectacular flocks have been present on flat calm days.

Other seabirds are quite scarce – a look at the position of Cloch Point on a map shows it to be land-locked by the Kintyre peninsula from the Atlantic Ocean, and it is a fair distance up the Firth of Clyde from the main seabird migration routes through the Irish Sea. However, there have been several Balearic Shearwaters with the Manxies (including one in late July 2002), and skuas are now seen more frequently, regularly Arctics and Bonxies but also a few Pomarines and a couple of Long-tailed in recent years. Tysties are common and breed in the area, and flocks of several hundred Guillemots can be present, all a change from the past when the inner Firth of Clyde and its estuary experienced much greater pollution levels.

Not far up the firth, dramatic changes in the populations of fish-eating species have also occurred on the Clyde estuary, which has become a nationally important site for Red-throated Divers and Slavonian Grebes. WeBS counts logged a record total of 343 Red-throated Divers in April 2002, a memorable 328 of them in a single gathering at Ardmore Point.

Iain Gibson
(*From* Clyde Bird News *1*)



Manx Shearwaters
(Chris Gibbins)

Torness, a migrant hot-spot. (Mike Fraser)

Birding with Energy - Lothian SOC's partnership with British Energy

The area around Torness Nuclear Power Station in East Lothian is well known to many local birders as a place that attracts spring and autumn migrants. A Pied Wheatear on the beach at Thorntonloch on 27-30 October 1991 was the seventh record for Scotland and put the site firmly on the birding map. Remarkably, a Desert Wheatear chose the same area, as well as the seawall surrounding the power station. Both species were "firsts" for the Lothians. A Short-toed Lark, only the third for the Lothians, was found on the short grass at Torness on 30 May 1989, where it remained until 3 June. Amazingly, a Shore Lark fed alongside it for several days.

The area is not just important for migrants. Ringed Plovers were noted breeding at Torness from 1993-99, with a maximum of five pairs in 1998. However, the species has not been noted in the last two years, mirroring a decline shown elsewhere in East Lothian over the least few years. A survey of the grassland area east of the power station suggested that Skylark and Meadow Pipit were the only breeding species, with six territories each.

Lothian SOC has recently formed a partnership with British Energy, aiming to carry out habitat improvement in the area around the power station. These improvements will aim to enhance the area for breeding birds, migrants and winter visitors. A management plan has been prepared entailing the provision of areas of scrub, open water and winter feeding. The first phase began with 20 volunteers planting 1,000 shrubs on 17 March. We hope that in a few years these will provide nest sites, feeding and shelter.

Another challenge of our Torness partnership involves the BTO/Hanson Bird Challenge. This nationwide competition aims to find the best industrial sites for birds in the UK, and also awards points for habitat enhancement. The idea is to record how many species are using such sites in the course of 2002. Torness has been entered for the first time this year and obviously we want it to do well! All you need to do is record all the bird species using the site, i.e. on the ground or hunting overhead. Fly-over birds not using the area cannot be counted. So, please, if you are in the area, note down what you see and send your observations to me a.s.a.p. (contact details below). Count boundaries are: south of the road to Skateraw beach, east of the old A1, north of the road to Thorntonloch Caravan Site, and down to the low-water mark.

Included in the opposition is Sizewell Power Station which got 187 species last year!

Ian Thomson
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(From* Lothian Bird News*, May 2002)

Bean Geese in the Clyde area - an update

Regular monitoring of the flock started in December 1989 and has continued intensively to the present day. The flock size has risen from the 1989/90 figure of 112 to the present total of 192 birds.

This trend is very unusual in European populations. Most flocks are either decreasing or have disappeared from traditional haunts, leaving only the strongholds in southern Scandinavia. The other British population in the Yare Valley (the Slammanan flock, as it has become known), arrives much earlier, around late Sept, and leaves later in mid to late February. This ostensibly means that for much of the winter our birds are the only Bean Geese in Britain and some of the earliest winter visitors to arrive in the country.

In 2001 the first 20 birds arrived on 24 September at Easter Fannyside Loch. Most birdwatchers will know this site, but probably don't know that it has been specifically bought as a reserve for the Bean Geese and is managed by the RSPB. Much of the study concentrates on site usage by the birds as they face ever-growing pressures. The impact of forestry and farming on what is undoubtedly the most defensive and wary of our goose species is becoming a big concern. The birds exploit marginal ground and require sites that suffer little or no disturbance, which means that we have to control access to the birds whenever possible.

With liaison between farmers and birdwatchers, all sectors must be catered for, but it must be highlighted that birders on a day out come low in the list of priorities. The reduction in the number of fields used by the birds has been decreasing and sites like Carron Valley Reservoir and Loch Ellrig have all but been abandoned for varying reasons, leaving just a few core areas.

To help fight for conservation initiatives, a Bean Goose Action Group has been established. Members include all the main conservation bodies, local councils and other interested parties. This move has ensured that detrimental impacts on the birds can be minimised and that we all work towards agreed aims to protect this nationally-important flock. It is also hoped to have viewing points at various sites on the plateau to allow greater controlled access, and information boards sited to keep birders up to date.

The flock is favouring two main areas at the moment. The first is Beam Farm in Falkirk District. To view the site go to Newcraig Cottage at NS849756 and park on the hard standing near the gate leading north over the moor. Walk a km or so to the turning circle which overlooks the field. A good view will be anything under 300m, but the birds are usually further away. *Please do not leave the path* - these birds are not like other geese which fly off to an adjacent field, but will go to the other end of their range some 5-10km away.

The other current site in Blackhill in North Lanarkshire. This can only be viewed by looking south from Fannyside Mill Farm at NS809734, some 1.5km away. I trust that the difficulty in studying these birds is apparent, as is the importance of maintaining the sanctity of a few core areas and important sites.

Over the years, the study has developed into a working partnership between myself and Angus Maciver and is now partly funded by the Bean Goose Action Group. A website giving an insight into the flock can be reached via the SOC's links page and would appear to have been well received. If you want to know more or to get involved, please contact us at 3 Mitchell Drive, Cardross G82 5JJ; e mail: john@fabalis.freeserve.co.uk, tel: 01389 841351. You will be made most welcome!

John Simpson
(From* Clyde Bird News *1)

A wetland alongside the River Dee at Cults, Inchgarth is the first, and only nature reserve run by the SOC, in this case the Grampian Branch. The establishment of the reserve was described by Ian Francis in SBN 58: 7 (June 2000). Here Ian brings us up to date with recent developments.

News from Inchgarth Nature Reserve – July 2002

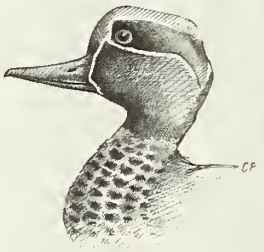
The wild-bird cover crop sown during 2001 began to come into its own from December onwards, as the Quinoa and Rape seed became available. Bearing in mind that before this crop was sown, the area of ground was dry grassland dominated by Cocksfoot and must have held very few birds indeed, the following table shows the maximum number of birds counted during the winter in the crop

Table 1. Maximum numbers of winter birds in wild-bird crop.

Sparrowhawk	1
Kestrel	1
Pheasant	12
Meadow Pipit	1
Dunnock	1
Robin	3
Stonechat	2
Song Thrush	1
Blackbird	2
Blue Tit	6
Rook	7
Chaffinch	200
Brambling	30
Greenfinch	1
Goldfinch	12
Linnet	2
Twite	1
Reed Bunting	10
Yellowhammer	1

Quinoa and Oil-seed Rape wild-bird cover crop sown at Inchgarth during 2001. (Ian Francis)

It seems obvious that the provision of wild-bird food in this way was helpful to many species, most of which were present in varying numbers throughout the winter. We may have drawn in birds from elsewhere, but it does demonstrate that if lots of farms grew this kind of crop then winter survival would be easier for many species. We considered the crop to have been a success and, therefore, with help from funding from a Schlumberger Environmental Award, in late May we organised the sowing of two acres of the crop, rather than one. We have divided the area into two halves – one containing a similar mix to last year, and the other dominated by Rape. Work last winter by the Grampian Ringing Group demonstrated how important this crop can be, particular for Linnets, Twite and Goldfinches. At the time of writing, the crop is growing strongly, and we await the results from the coming winter with great anticipation.



Teal (Crispin Fisher)

Cattle have now returned to graze the grassland and pool-side vegetation (from June), and during last winter, the muddy edges and cover around the pool provided habitat for a good range of birds. The following species maxima were recorded:

Table 2. Maximum counts of waterbirds at Inchgarth pool.

Heron	3
Teal	35
Mallard	100
Wigeon	20
Jack Snipe	6
Snipe	34

Creating muddy margins and an island is aimed to improve the habitat for feeding and roosting birds at Inchgarth. (Ian Francis)

Great efforts were made by Iain and David Landsman, along with Ewan Weston, to open up the edges and create a nesting or roosting island safe from ground predators. The photograph shows the result of their physical work in March. Our next project is to investigate the creation of a larger shallow scrape, bare of vegetation and attractive to waders. This is mainly through *Juncus* rush clearance near the pool. We hope this might attract a wider range of autumn migrants.

As before, if any branch members have suggestions about the reserve or want to get involved in future activities, we will be pleased to hear from you.

Ian Francis
ifnp@clara.co.uk

Effects of Greylag Geese on breeding waterfowl at Gladhouse Reservoir, Lothian

At Gladhouse in 2000 only Greylag Goose (ca 20 pairs) and Mute Swan (one pair) had a successful breeding season. Visits have been fewer than in past years, but have concentrated on assessing the fortunes of breeding wildfowl. This factor has not affected the results. Only one brood of Mallard (a single small duckling scuttling away) was noted. There were no broods of Tufted Duck, Teal, Coot nor Great Crested Grebe and by mid-June very few birds were to be seen on the water except geese and swans.

Possible adverse factors affecting breeding wildfowl at Gladhouse:

Mink. In past years this species has certainly been the main factor in decimating the nesting wildfowl. The estates tell us that they are not the problem now that they used to be and that they are not being caught in their traps around the reservoir.

Water levels/wet summers. Two very wet summers and the recent dropping of the water level for repairs would not help the survival of young birds, but these have occurred in the past without any lasting damage. During the winter of 1997/98 the water level was lowered for repair work and we did expect some disruption to the diving waterbirds and thought that this, or Mink, was responsible for poor Coot numbers. Things have deteriorated even more since but it was not until recently that the possibility of large numbers of geese having an effect came to mind.

Greylag Goose. On 29 May 2000, 464 adult and young geese were concentrated in several groups and probably at times dominated most areas along the south shore. Large numbers are present from March to July. The table below gives the build-up in numbers of Greylag at Gladhouse since 1994. By 1995 there were over 100 geese and numbers in spring/summer quadrupled in the next two years. There was no obvious (to the observer) adverse effect on other species as breeding success on the reservoir is erratic.

The present status of the other breeding species and their possible relationship to the geese are discussed individually.

Mallard. Broods used to be regularly noted along the south shore with six or more families annually. In 2000 only one small duckling was noted once. The Mallard broods fed along the edge of the emergent vegetation and it seems probable that they have been overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of geese and gone elsewhere, either up the streams or to small local ponds. Certainly the number of Mallards on Gladhouse in late August are well down in recent years. The local situation is not helped by the October fishing now practised on Portmore and Rosebery.

Tufted Duck. The status of breeding Tufted can be gauged by the numbers of females in May attended by perhaps double the number of drakes. From 1995-98 around 10 ducks suggested there was a slow recovery from the depths of the Mink predation, although still a long way below the original 25 pairs. Very young broods can be wiped out by wet, cold spells, so it was not until 1999, when only one female was seen, that a decrease became noticeable. Now perhaps we are down to only the one pair. Tufted Duck feed in the shallower water round the shore and this is the area where the geese swarm, flying back and forth to the adjacent fields. Until recently there has been an annual arrival in June/July of mostly drake Tufted which stayed to moult. These birds are in small parties, often sleeping or sheltering among the floating duckweed or in a flock not far offshore. Numbers dropped from the normal 200-300 to 22 in 2000; goose disturbance is the likely cause.

Numbers of breeding feral Greylag Geese at Gladhouse Reservoir, 1986 - 1999.

Year	Max full-grown birds in breeding season	Max young
1986	2	0
1987	6	0
1988	6	5
1989	15	7
1990	11	28
1991	13	26
1992	41	23
1993	49	33
1994	59	67
1995	50	(13 broods)
1996	90	(23 broods)
1997	100+	(27 broods)
1998	70	104 (23 broods)
1999	80+	(21 broods)

Great Crested Grebe. When grazing by sheep was ended 30 years ago there was a tremendous growth of willows and rushes round the water's edge. The number of pairs of this species rose from two to six, with five broods in one memorable year. More recently, there have been 3-4 pairs nest-building, with none breeding successfully. For the past three years most birds have left the reservoir by July (mid-June in 2000), which is a new feature. The southwest corner was always a favourite nesting area. In 1999 there were few sightings here although the birds did build a nest with no evidence of eggs having been laid. In 2000 this and the burn-mouth area were completely deserted by the species. There are always numbers of geese on the water or flying in and out to feed. Other sites suffer the same fate. There is little doubt that goose disturbance is the cause of desertion of these traditional Great Crested Grebe sites that had been used for the past 50 years.

Little Grebe. This species has not been affected to the same extent as Great Crested Grebe. Their nests are often built in thick willow cover but recently the more open nests on floating duck-weed have been noted. Few young were seen in 2000 and no small groups feeding out in the open water in July/autumn have been seen although several years ago there were always 10 or more.

Coot. The few pairs which bred and raised young a few years back have nearly gone. Of the two birds in the southwest corner in spring 1999, one soon disappeared – a victim of Mink! However, a pair in the southwest corner in 2000 did not apparently nest and certainly there have been no young in recent years.

Moorhen. The nest of this species is usually built further inshore from open water than that of the Coot. At least three territories persist, in denser cover, and young broods are regularly noted. As this species is heavily preyed upon by Mink, this provides more evidence that some other factor is responsible for their general decline.

On the evidence it seems that the present wipe-out of breeding waterfowl is due to one major factor – the mass of Greylag dominating the more sheltered shores of the reservoir. More to the point, can anything be done to rectify the problem?

The late R.W.J. Smith

(This was Bob's last contribution to the Club publications, which he keenly supported for many years. An appreciation of his life and work appears in the last issue of Scottish Birds *22: 117-19).*

Early days at Aberlady Bay

Wartime anti-tank blocks at Aberlady Bay, ca 1950. (Keith Macgregor)

Aberlady Bay in 1946 had been largely out of bounds during the war years, and apart from invasion defences was also used as a target-practice area. The targets were mini-submarines moored out on the sand bar and at least one of these shell-shocked subs has been visible at certain tides for many years.

These facts were unknown to me in that year as I approached on my utility black wartime Humber bicycle having heard that a ternery existed in the bay. The roadside from the village and across the estuary half way to the timber bridge was lined with concrete anti-tank blocks which extended right up the saltings, some of which can be still seen today.

Reaching the bridge, two terns perched on the handrail seemed to confirm that the ternery may be fact, spurred me on, only to be abruptly stopped-short by a notice at the bridge prominent with the word DANGER! This warning referred to possible unexploded munitions and caused a momentary doubt about going on. However, the terns were there and had to be checked out, but with added caution!

The aspect on crossing the bridge was completely open compared with today – no fences, no conifers or hawthorn and only relatively small clumps of buckthorn, with much rabbit-cropped grass providing good ground-nesting habitat for various species. Following a track towards the Marl Loch, then much vegetated, I passed the remains of an old cottage on the right halfway out and a well-defined old curling pond to the left as well as crossing the old coach track from Gullane which traversed the bay to Aberlady – obviously only used at low tide! Just to the west of the Marl Loch was a substantial hexagonal defensive blockhouse, brick-and-concrete built, but now peacefully occupied by nesting Swallows. Straying down to the saltings I was aware of a now constant clamour of alarm calls mostly from nesting Lapwing and Redshank, but also sharper calls of terns. Quite soon I came across

Redshank (Roger Warhurst).

Frank Hamilton (left) and Keith Macgregor ringing wader chicks, Aberlady Bay ca 1949. (Ray Jackson)

what I took to be a terns' nest with two eggs in a mini-scrape in the grass. Its identity was proved when its owner, a Common Tern, was seen to alight. There were just one or two other nests scattered on the saltings; hardly a colony. Walking back along the longer grass towards the bridge produced a downy nest with two large, pale olive eggs which had to be my first Eider – a great birding day.

By the summer of 1947 further visits meant further exploration toward the dunes, and Ringed Plover nests were added to the list. However, the most exciting find was the spit of sand and shells fingering out from the nearest dunes and this is where the majority of terns were breeding, there proving to be three species: Common, Arctic and, best of all, Little. At first some confusion existed between Little Tern and Ringed Plover eggs, but was soon rectified by nearby comparisons. In 1946/47 a maximum of about 30 pairs of terns nested, but many, if not most, were either washed away by high tides or taken by egg collectors. In consequence of which fewer than 10 young ever fledged.

Offshoots of the sandspit colony were found in the dunes, along the saltings and even a few pairs attempting to nest upstream from the timber bridge. These were easily visible from the main road and thus vulnerable. Even in the peak tern year of 1952 when 138 nests were counted on 22 June, breeding success was depressingly low.

The most interesting breeding wader was undoubtedly Dunlin and their presence and display were apparent on these early visits, but it was only on 13 June 1948 that the first nest of four eggs was located, accomplished by watching the bird furtively return to its very concealed nest. In these days three to four pairs were breeding and several young were found – a rare sea-level location in southeastern Scotland.

Of other waders there were noticeably more than today and nest counts made in April/May 1949 gave totals of five Redshank, nine Ringed Plover and no less than 26 Lapwing, with no doubt others missed. The high density of Lapwings was certainly due to the short rabbit-grazed grass and the subsequent decline was due in part to the advent of myxomatosis.

At this time the downside of the bay, apart from the constant attention of egg collectors, was the amount of indiscriminate shooting that took place at any time of the day with most of the damage being done not by the genuine wildfowler but by those who simply used birds for target practice, often leaving injured birds to die. Firing into massed wader flocks was not uncommon. For example, on 30 January 1949 a count revealed 25 dead or injured birds of 13 species, including Curlew, Redshank, Knot, Dunlin, Common Scoter and Wigeon.

After public pressure, the area was made a Local Nature Reserve 50 years ago in 1952, not only to protect the bird interest but also its rich flora. Initial local problems took some time to subside and although the breeding species density may never return to former days, perhaps a little habitat creation and adjustment could enliven the future interest that the area has to offer.

Keith Macgregor

(Keith has been birdwatching at Aberlady Bay for longer than he cares to remember and is one of Edinburgh's most active birders and a loyal supporter of the Club. He was formerly SOC local recorder for East Lothian and Berwickshire and was the author, with Frank Hamilton, of "The Birds of Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve", reprinted in 1960 by the SOC from the Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society *Vol VIII; price 5/-, postage 4d extra. (I think an update is due?). If any other members would like to cast their minds back to their early or formative days birding in Scotland, be it five or fifty years ago, we would be very keen to hear from them).*

A Common Tern nest on the saltings. (Ray Jackson)

This is the first in an occasional series of articles on Scotland's bird artists. If there is anyone you would like to see featured in future, do let us know. You may want to write about or interview someone yourself for SBN? Should we broaden the scope to include bird photographers and writers working in Scotland? Please send us your thoughts and ideas.

BIRD ARTISTS IN SCOTLAND - Chris Rose

The first thing to catch our eye on arriving at Chris Rose's delightful Borders cottage was a familiar-looking clump of Butterbur by the driveway. On enquiry, yes, it is the same plant that features in one of his paintings! The Whitethroat perched on a leaf in the painting was not to be seen, but noisy families of Swallows twittered around the buildings and over the garden.

The Swallows were an appropriate welcoming committee, as Chris's first major commission was to illustrate the Helm handbook *Swallows and Martins of the World*. Published in 1989 with text by Angela Turner, it was voted the *British Birds* "Best Bird Book of the Year". Depicting species as familiar as House Martin to the obscure (and possibly almost extinct) White-eyed River Martin, the 24 plates set a new standard for their genre, a standard that has probably only since been surpassed by the artist himself.

Chris has lived near Melrose for ten years or so, having migrated north, firstly from Uganda (where he was born in 1959) to England at the age of six, thence to Scotland. The latter move followed a spell working as illustrator for the Dorset Heritage Coast Project, a post which he took having failed (thank goodness) to find employment as a biologist after graduating from Nottingham University in 1981. During his time painting information boards and sign posts (which must now be collectors' items) he decided that a career in painting was not only possible but desirable, and he began to build up a portfolio and submit work to galleries. A three-month trek through India and Nepal in 1983 provided new and exciting material. The resultant paintings were exhibited the Mall Galleries in London in the annual Exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists, to which he was elected a member.

Chris Rose with two of his plates for The Handbook of Birds of the World. *(Elaine Rose)*

His work reached an even wider audience when he won the prestigious *British Birds* "Bird Illustrator of the Year Award" in 1986. A major influence and support at this time and since was one of the judges, the artist Robert Gillmor.

A print of the seriously alluring Lady Agnew of Lochnaw by Singer Sargent is almost the only non-birdy picture on the walls of Chris's split-level studio. She overlooks a large "in progress" oil of a Mallard and ducklings on one level, and the disciplined output of book illustrations on the other. His work can be seen in many titles, including three volumes of *BWP* and, most recently, in the monumental *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. We were lucky enough to be shown a couple of almost completed plates destined for a future volume of *HBW* - brilliant and exquisite South American fruit-eaters and more delicately subdued South and Central American cotingas, with two Bare-necked Fruit-crows.

Another on-going project is a monograph of the world's robins and chats. Chris extracted from a drawer some plates at various stages of development: pages of perfect Middle Eastern wheatears, scrub-robins from Africa, stonechats from the taiga. They were all stunning. Though by necessity positioned somewhat formally on the page, every bird looked you in the eye and it would have been no surprise if one had hopped off in hot pursuit of a passing insect.

Producing plate after plate of often little-known species to tight deadlines must be a wearying task, but this is certainly not apparent in Chris's work. His illustrations have freshness, clarity and character which only someone who knows and understands birds can capture. Their structure and plumage are perfectly rendered and there is a liveliness to the birds which belies the fact that many had to be painted from museum skins.

Whitethroat (Chris Rose)

A vital distraction from hours at the easel or drawing board is found in gardening. He and Elaine, a scientific proof-reader, have created a beautiful garden from what was essentially a field. Bounding the lawns and more formal areas of colourful herbaceous borders are a small burn and plenty of rough grass and newly planted native trees to provide good habitat for wildlife. (His garden list includes Bluethroat, although to his annoyance he didn't see it but was gleefully told about it over the 'phone!).

Travel is another of his great pleasures. Recently back from California (a painting of two Sea Otters was in progress next to the Mallard), he has travelled extensively in Africa, the Far East and Europe in search of birds and subjects for his paintings. Expeditions with fellow painters and sculptors of the Artists for Nature Foundation to the Bierbze marshlands in Poland and the Extremadura region of Spain helped to promote the conservation of these important areas.

On leaving the studio after a planned one-hour visit had somehow extended to three (well, when birders and artists get together there is always plenty to talk about), we noticed a framed set of photographs on the wall. One particular shot caught our attention, not so much because it was of Chris being awarded the "Bird Illustrator of the Year Award" 16 years ago, but because he was still wearing the same distinctive orange shirt. He laughed and hurriedly pointed out that it was, of course, now only worn when painting. If, however, you would like to help Chris update his wardrobe, then buy a copy of his latest book, *The Grebes of the World*. With text by Malcolm Ogilvie and published by Bruce Coleman, it will be on the shelves towards Christmas.

Mike and Liz Fraser

Whitethroat (Chris Rose)

Originals and prints by Chris Rose can be seen regularly at the following galleries and websites:

Abbey Artifacts Gallery, Abbey St Bathans (01361 840312; www.abbeyartifacts.co.uk)

The Nigel Stacy-Marks Gallery, Perth and Auchterarder (www.stacy-marks.co.uk)

The annual **SWLA exhibition** at the Mall Galleries, London (www.swla.co.uk)

The Wildlife Art Gallery, Lavenham, Suffolk, (www.wildlifeartgallery@btinternet.com)

On The Wild Side Gallery, Great Malvern (www.wildsidegallery.co.uk)

and on www.birdillustrators.com

Summer Light (Chris Rose)

REVIEWS

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 7. Del Hoyo. J., Elliot, A. and Sargatal, J. (Eds.). 2002. Lynx Edicions. 613 pp, 70 colour plates, 317 colour photographs and maps. ISBN 84-87334-37-7. Hbk. £110.

If I was stranded on a desert island (as the cliché goes) and was able to choose only one book, without hesitation I would want this set. Quite simply *'HBW'* (as it is affectionately known) is the most superb set of bird books ever published.

Volume 7 (Jacamars, Puffbirds, Barbets, Toucans, Honeyguides and Woodpeckers) completes the non-passerine section. We are fortunate to have a further nine volumes to look forward to, covering the world's passerines.

Continuing the practice set in earlier volumes, specialists have been used to produce the family accounts (e.g. Hans Winkler and David Christie who previously wrote the text for the Pica Press *Woodpeckers* guide, are responsible for the woodpeckers), which are lavishly illustrated with colour photos. The individual species accounts are necessarily concise, but remarkably instructive, all being accompanied by a range map. Every species is fully illustrated on 70 outstanding colour plates (painted by sixteen artists including Hilary Burn, Ian Lewington, Chris Rose and Ian Willis).

I thoroughly recommend that anyone who is not already collecting this series should commence doing so without further delay. Whilst not cheap, it nevertheless represents outstanding value for money.

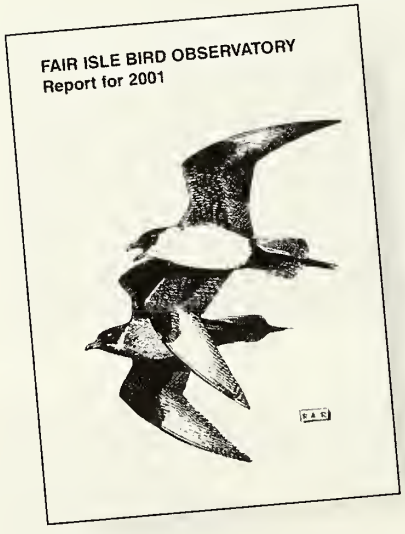
Ron Forrester

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Report for 2001. Shaw, D. and Shaw, H. (Eds). 2002. Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. 112 pp, 18 colour plates, b&w illustrations, map. £6.50 (incl. p&p).

This is the 54th annual report produced by the observatory. As usual, it is full of the sort of information and detail that Fair Isle fans and island buffs in general will enjoy, and every aspect of observatory life is covered. Staff, vehicles, boilers and sewage systems all feature, as does the addition of a new bar in the observatory! Habitat improvements include fencing-off areas to establish cover for migrants, all the more important as fewer crops are grown on the island nowadays.

Interesting accounts of moths and other wildlife are included, but the bulk of the report is devoted to birds. Seabirds had a dreadful breeding season, almost certainly due to a shortage of sandeels. Only four Arctic Tern chicks fledged from 2,836 nests (ironically, the highest number ever recorded on the island). Puffin productivity and pullus weights were the lowest on record and only a "handful" of Kittiwake chicks fledged from 8,200 pairs.

The relatively low number of birds ringed (3,913 for the year) reflected the seabird failure and a very quiet spring for migrants (the highlights of which were Great Snipe and three White-spotted Bluethroats). Autumn was a bit more lively, with Black-faced Bunting (Scotland's first) and Pallid Swift (Scotland's third and Shetland's first) being the major island rarities. White-rumped Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Black-throated Thrush and old faithfuls such as Olive-backed Pipit (possibly as many as six), Pechora Pipit and rare warblers in the shape of Pallas's Grasshopper, Lanceolated, Blyth's Reed, Radde's and Dusky, helped maintain Fair Isle's reputation as *the* place to be during migration if you want to see quality birds and avoid the Scilly masses.



Among the predominantly "in the hand" bird photographs (including one of more Tree Sparrows than some of us see all year nowadays) are fine shots of Icterine Warbler and Rustic Bunting in the field. The more distant Black-faced Bunting is suitably tantalising.

Visitor numbers (up 18% on 2000) continue to improve, boosted by special accommodation rates in August and October, both great months for migrants. This report confirms that Fair Isle remains a friendly, vibrant place of which the birds are only one, albeit the most important, attraction.

Mike Fraser

Pheasants, Partridges & Grouse, Including buttonquails, sandgrouse and allies. Madge, S. and McGowan,P. 2002. Illustrated by Norman Arlott, Robin Budden, Daniel Cole, John Cox, Carl D'Silva, Kim Franklin and David Mead. Christopher Helm, London. 488pp, 72 plates, numerous maps. ISBN 0-7136-3966-0. £45.00

This is the latest in the Helm Identification Guides series and claims to be the first comprehensive review of all the world's galliforme birds (other than megapodes and the Neotropical guans and currasows), together with the buttonquails and the unique Plains-wanderer. This family includes some of the most sought-after birds in the world and some of the most endangered. Many of these species are colourful or spectacular and no volume about these birds could fail to be a beautiful book just to look at, and this one is certainly that.

The book is divided into two sections, the plates in the first and the species' accounts in the second. Unlike many other books in this series, there is not a lengthy introduction to the group being examined and I found this a little disappointing, but the relatively brief introduction may have been necessary to save space. More discussion on the relationships and evolution of the species covered would have led to a more interesting book. There is, however, some discussion of taxonomy throughout the species accounts in the introductions to each genus or subgenus.

Any identification guide stands or falls on the quality of its illustrations and the illustrations in this book are beautiful, although not of the quality we have come to expect from this series. Many of plates look old-fashioned and the birds are not really lifelike. This would be understandable if the artists were illustrating such little-known species as the Congo Peacock or Udzungwa Partridge, but it also happens in plates of familiar gamebirds. The colours are not quite right on many plates such as the *Alectoris* partridge plates, while the francolin plates are excellent. Browsing through the pheasant plates is enough to make any birder want to jump on the next plane to south-east Asia.

The species accounts are the meat of the book and as well giving information on identification they also cover habits and the species' conservation status. All too often the status section paints a bleak picture. They also have an expanded introductory note to many accounts which gives snippets of additional information about each species such as how it got its name. The accounts are variable in length with the longest for well-known species such as the Common Pheasant and shorter accounts of half a page or so for little-known species.

This is not one of the finest books in this series but the birds it is about contain some of the most stunning and spectacular species still in existence

What this book does is show how little we know about many species and how close we are to losing them forever. It is worthy of its place on any bookshelf for that reason alone but it is not the only reason that the book is worth its space. Overall, I think that this is a successful addition to the series.

David J. Kelly

Birds of Seychelles. Skerrett, A., Bullock, I. and Disley, T. 2001. Christopher Helm/ A&C Black, London, 320 pp. ISBN 0-7136-3973-3. £25.00

There were many times during what masqueraded as summer in Scotland that my thoughts wandered south to the azure seas and golden beaches of Seychelles. The arrival of this book did not help to keep my attention focussed on the homefront.

Seychelles comprises 155 islands scattered over the Indian Ocean from just south of the equator to just north of Madagascar. The main birding attractions are twelve endemic species (including some of the world's rarest birds) and sensational seabird colonies (not least the million birds of ten species that breed on Aride). A mouth-watering variety of migrants and vagrants add spice to the birder's menu.

Tony Disley's 53 colour plates, containing almost 1000 illustrations of 242 species, are excellent. His passerines are particularly good, but all the birds have a clean, uncluttered look and capture the essential character of their subjects. Some are depicted in a local context, such as the Seychelles Fody nobbling a Fairy Tern egg. I particularly like the sea-reflecting turquoise underbelly of the Sooty Tern! Opposite each plate is a summary of the birds' main identification features. A status and distribution code would have been handy here.

The book is written by Seychelles' top birder/naturalist (Adrian Skerrett) and a former warden of Aride (Ian Bullock), so their credentials are impeccable; this is reflected in the impressively comprehensive and informative text. A section on the origins and evolution of Seychelles birds details how many species have come not from Africa (despite its relative proximity) but from India and southeast Asia. The islands' Moorhen, for example, is the same race as that in Malaysia and the Philippines. The northern islands' race of the Green-backed Heron is most similar to the African, whereas the one from Aldabra is thought to be originally Asian!

In support of the far-flung origins of many of the resident landbirds are vagrants of similarly distant provenance. An eclectic range of rarities and a host of migrants have been recorded, ranging from Pacific Swift and Olive-backed Pipit to Redstart and Willow Warbler. (Interestingly, many migrants clearly arrive by design rather than accident and return in subsequent years. I once caught a Turnstone on Cousin Island which had been ringed there 18 years previously. I expect it had spent every intervening winter there, and who could blame it?).

The individual species texts form the bulk of the book. These give detailed descriptions and useful notes on similar, potentially confusing species, even if they haven't yet occurred. (No fewer than nine "similar species" are detailed under Jouanin's Petrel). The nesting, past and present population status, threats and conservation are described for breeding species. These have been thoroughly researched and are well referenced. The historical accounts make fascinating and, in all too many cases, depressing reading, although on-going conservation successes with the likes of the Seychelles Magpie-robin (whose world population at one point was 15 or less individuals on a single island) are heartening. Such detail is rare in a field guide and makes *Birds of Seychelles* a good read as well as an essential reference and identification manual.

This outstanding book will enable visiting birders to appreciate Seychelles' rare endemics, transoceanic vagrants and magical seabirds to the full. As important, it will also be a very valuable educational tool within the islands where conservation is largely dependent upon local awareness and sympathy. If you ever visit Seychelles, do make it known that you are there to look at birds. Tourism is the islands' major source of revenue and if the authorities recognise the importance of birdwatching to this industry, then the birds will ultimately benefit.

Mike Fraser

Also received

Bird Census Techniques. Bibby, C.J, Hill, D.A, Burgess, N.D. and Mustoe, S. 2000. Academic Press. ISBN 0-12-095831-7. £35. This is an updated edition of a book first published in 1992. It brings together in one place all the necessary information for those involved in surveys and censuses etc.

Birds (Collins Gem Guide). Flegg. J. 1999. Collins. ISBN 0-00-711381-1. £4.99. A new edition of yet another of the many offerings from Collins in the field. This is a very simple small format guide aimed at young people.

Birds of Africa. Vol. 6, Passeriformes. Picathartes to Oxpeckers. Fry. C.H. and Keith, S. (Eds). 2000. Academic Press. ISBN 0-12-137306-1. £99. The fifth and penultimate volume in this long-running series, with descriptions, pictures and distribution maps. Clearly an essential purchase for anyone already owning the previous five volumes!

Shorebirds. Thompson, D. and Byrkjedal. I. 2001. Colin Baxter. ISBN 1-84107-075-0. £9. Excellent photographs and user-friendly text, though it is not quite clear at whom it is aimed. It covers shorebirds world wide, though it is not a handbook nor an identification guide. There is some information about biology and behaviour, and a chapter on conservation. It is obviously not for the expert, nor is it a 'coffee table book'. At the price, though, some people will find it a worthwhile addition to their shelves.

Snipes of the Western Palaearctic. Rouxel, R. 2000. Eveil Nature. ISBN 2-84000-027-X. Produced by the Organisation Migrateurs du Paléarctique Occidental and translated from the French. A comprehensive study of the three species of Western Palaearctic snipe, described as secretive and little known.

RSPB Handbook of British Birds. Holden, P. and Cleeves, T. 2001. Helm. ISBN 0-7136-5713-8. £9.99. Described as "a reference book for anyone interested in birds", covers 280 species "regularly occurring in Britain and Ireland." One page per species with paragraphs on identification, habits, voice, habitat, food, breeding, movements and migration, population and conservation, a distribution map and 2-5 pictures. Not a rival to the Collins Bird Guide, but well laid out and presumably aimed at the starter market, though if so one wonders whether it was sensible to include some of the scarcer species (e.g. Kentish Plover, Aquatic Warbler).

The breeding ecology and conservation of the ring ouzel* Turdus torquatus *in Britain. Burfield, I.J. 2002. PhD thesis. Members will be familiar with Ian's work on Ring Ouzels, about which he gave a talk at the Conference in 2000. This is the end-result of his work. He points out how little has been published on Ring Ouzels compared to other British red-listed birds.

John Davies

NOTICES

Birdwatch Artist of the Year Awards

Entries are invited for the Birdwatch Artist of the Year Awards, sponsored by HarperCollins and Swarovski Optic, and now established as the world's premier bird art competition. There are four entry categories: Colour Section; Identification Section; Black and White Section; Under-18 Section. The judges are particularly keen to attract entries from young artists, as the under-18 section offers them the ideal opportunity to gain national recognition. It is, of course, important that future talent in this field is fostered wherever possible. In addition, and chosen from the section winners, an overall winner's prize is awarded. There are substantial prizes on offer. Each section winner will receive a high-quality pair of Swarovski binoculars, £250 worth of HarperCollins books and a three-year subscription to *Birdwatch* magazine. The overall winner will, in addition, be awarded £1,000 cash.

All winners and other selected entrants will be invited to a special presentation at The Mall Galleries in London, home of the Society of Wildlife Artists, where their work will be on display. The winners' work will also be featured in *Birdwatch* magazine.

Entry to the Awards is free and a registration form, together with a full statement of the rules, can be found in the June issue of *Birdwatch* or obtained by application in writing to: Birdwatch Artist of the Year Award, 3D/F Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, Islington, London N1 3QP.

Following registration, all completed artwork entries must be received by 30 Nov 2002. If you have any queries, please contact Dominic Mitchell, Publisher and Editor, on 020 7704 9495.

Sightings of colour-dyed Twite

During winter 2002 a number of ringers in various regions of Scotland will be colour-dyeing Twite through a collaborative project. One main objective of the study is to increase our knowledge of winter dispersal. Could you please look out for any marks on Twite, noting dye colour, location of dye, date and grid reference. Please report any sightings to the Secretary of the Colour-Dyeing Twite Project: Lyn Wells, Findon Cottage, Clashmore, Dornoch, Sutherland IV21 3RG. Tel: 01862 881 257; e-mail: Lazytrout@care4free.net All sightings will be acknowledged. Thank you for any help you can give.

The **2002 Scottish Ringers Conference** will be held at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, from 22-24 November. For further details please contact: Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen, AB16 5DS. Tel 01224 483717, e-mail: alistair@ cairncry.freeserve.co.uk.

The **Ayrshire Bird Report 2001** has been published and is available from Harbour Point HQ at a price of £4.00 each.

Lochwinnoch RSPB Nature Reserve Book Sale will be on 15-22 Sept 2002. Natural history books (magazines, journals and even maps) will be offered for sale and full proceeds or, in some cases, a 10% commission, will be donated to the RSPB. Last year's sale was such a success that it has been decided to make it an annual event. For further details please contact Joan Shaw on 01505 842 663; e-mail: joan.shaw@ rspb.org.uk.

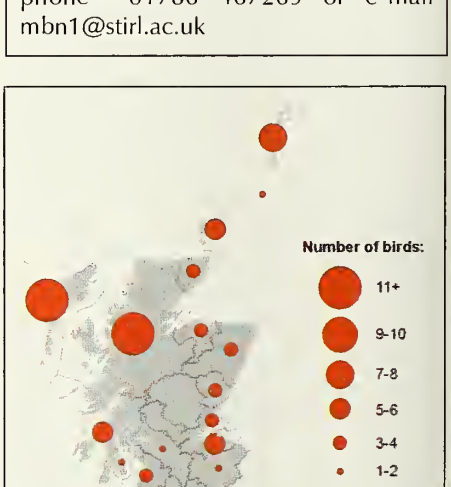
Rose-coloured Starlings in Scotland summer 2002 – a record influx

The main event of summer 2002 was the remarkable influx of Rose-coloured Starlings with around 80 seen in Scotland between 3rd June and early August. Putting this number into perspective makes the influx even more remarkable as 2001 held the previous record total in Scotland with 25 reports throughout the whole year. Scotland has not been unique this year as many European countries, including France, Netherlands, Hungary and Norway (with a flock of 17 seen there in June) experiencing record-breaking influxes of this beautiful central Asian wanderer.

All the birds seen in this influx have obviously been adults or first summers. The map shows the distribution of sightings in Scotland. The first bird reported was at Cumnock (Ayrshire) on 3rd June with Starlings in a back garden (which was typical for a large proportion of the reports). In the next fortnight 30+ were seen, with a further 15+ in the last week of June. Mid-June was definitely when the invasion was at its peak. Birds found in July and August were probably wandering ones that had already arrived. A large proportion of these were in the north and west. Amongst the arrivals in June was a remarkable six birds (including four seen together) with the large mobile Starling flocks in the Sea Buckthorn between Gullane Point and Muirfield golf course (Lothian) from 5th June (a record British count). The map shows, however, that

Fair Isle Bird Observatory is running a 50% reduction off the price of accommodation during 11–25 October 2002, meaning you can stay from as little as £15 per night on a full-board basis! The Observatory also has a grant scheme for young ornithologists to enable them to come and assist in Observatory work and gain valuable work experience. For details, please ring 01595 760 258 or e-mail fairisle.birdobs@zetnet.co.uk.

Forth Naturalist and Historian, University of Stirling The annual "Man and the Landscape" Symposium will be held on Sat 16th Nov 2002 at the Univ. of Stirling. The theme *Scotland's Weather and Climate - Living with Change*, addresses national and local issue relating to our natural heritage and society. Enquiries to M. Scott, phone 01786 467269 or e-mail mbn1@stirl.ac.uk



records came from throughout Scotland with the best numbers on the Outer Hebrides (13+), Highland (12), Shetland (eight) and Orkney (seven). This distribution is actually not unusual for the species even in more routine years, a distribution that is also shown by that other near-Eastern gem the Black-headed Bunting.

This is the third consecutive year that there have been invasions of Rose-coloured Starlings into Western Europe. Perhaps this pattern could become the norm with the first breeding in Western Europe or even Scotland not too far away? Predicting what species could become the next British colonist is, like the Rose-coloured Starling itself, notoriously unpredictable, with forecasts that species like River Warbler and Penduline Tit would be breeding regularly in Britain so far proving unfounded.

Angus Murray

RECENT REPORTS, May – July 2002

Although not immediately evident, this spring has parallels with that of 10 years ago. Those who remember that magical season may struggle to see the similarity, but many of the species prominent this year were the same species that were seen in record numbers then. For example, although only around 15 **Icterine Warblers** were seen from 14th May this included a singing male at Tweedbank (Borders) on 22nd May – 4th June and a remarkable record of a pair that successfully nested on Stronsay (Orkney). The only other successful breeding in Scotland was in 1992 when a pair was seen carrying food on Speyside. A pair of **Marsh Warblers** also bred successfully this year on Shetland (third Scottish breeding record). A total of 32+ **Marsh Warblers** was seen from 29th May including six on Fair Isle on 6th June (a record day-count) and mainland singles at East Barns (Lothian) on 8th-10th June and Fife Ness on 8th-11th June. There is currently only one accepted record for Lothian, with none previously for Fife.

Marsh Warbler, East Barns, June 2002. (Ian Andrews)

Elsewhere amongst the scarcities there was a **Savi's Warbler** on Foula (Shetland) on 29th-30th May (seventh for Shetland and Scotland); single **Melodious Warblers** at St Abbs Head on 22nd May (first for Borders) and Stronsay on 7th June; 53 **Red-spotted Bluethroats** in May and June, of which a remarkable 29 were on Fair Isle alone with, equally remarkably, only two on mainland Scotland - in Fife on 19th May. Over 65 **Red-backed Shrikes** were reported from 9th May, almost all of which, like the Bluethroats, were on the Northern Isles. Only nine **Wrynecks** were reported, all in May on Orkney and Shetland. Five **Hoopoes** were reported in May. The only **Short-toed Lark** was on Fair Isle on 5th May, where the only two **Ortolan Buntings** and two **Little Buntings** were also seen in May. Single **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were reported between 24th May and 8th June on the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Isle of May and 25+ **Common Rosefinches** from 13th May included six on Fair Isle in May and five there in June. Like 1992, it was a good spring for **Golden Oriole** with the first on South Uist on 18th May followed by 15 others in May and June on Orkney and Shetland. A remarkable 80 or so **Rose-coloured Starlings** were seen from 3rd June, whilst **Woodchat Shrikes** were found at Tayport (Fife) on 26th May, near Dailly on 10th-11th June (second Ayrshire record) and on Foula (Shetland) on 9th-10th July. Two migrant **Nightjars** were seen, one at Fife Ness on 8th June being the first in Fife since the 19th century, and one on Fair Isle on 18th July.

Tawny Pipit, Foveran, May 2002. (Harry Scott)

A **Richard's Pipit** was at Mull of Galloway (Dumfries and Galloway) on 10th May, with one on Fair Isle on 11th–17th May. Three **Tawny Pipits** were reported: on South Uist on 10th May, at Skaw, Unst (Shetland) on 25th-30th May and a popular bird at Foveran (Aberdeenshire) on 13th-16th May at the same location as the only previously accepted county record. This was probably the most twitched passerine on the Scottish mainland in the period, showing how barren it was for much of the time. Looking back at the records, however, some impressive rarities stand out and, as usual, most were from the Northern Isles. A **Tree Swallow**, watched over a three-hour period at Burrafirth, Unst (Shetland) on 29th May will be the first record for Scotland if accepted, whilst the third spring **Calandra Lark** in the last four years on the Northern Isles was on North Ronaldsay on 10th-11th May (first record for Orkney). Nine **Subalpine Warblers** were seen between 10th May and 22nd June all, apart from one on the Isle of May, on Shetland. The Isle of May had a **Greenish Warbler** on 7th-8th June and a **Thrush Nightingale** on 10th-12th May, with two others on Fair Isle in May. A **Red-throated Pipit** was on Fair Isle on 16th May; this species remains inexplicably rare elsewhere in Scotland. Two **Great Reed Warblers** were seen on Shetland, on Unst on 29th May and on Foula on 8th June–11th July. An **Arctic Warbler** was there on 10th July with singles on Fair Isle on 19th and 30th July. All four previous midsummer Scottish records had been on Fair Isle and Foula. A more expected midsummer rarity these days came in the form of a male **Two-barred Crossbill** at Vidlin (Shetland) on 13th-19th July.

Black-headed Bunting, Gullane, 3rd June 2002. (Pat Morris)

East Lothian hit a purple patch in early June with a male **Black-headed Bunting** photographed in a Gullane garden on 3rd, the first for Lothian. A male **Rustic Bunting** at Thorntonloch on 6th-8th was the second county record. A male of the latter species was also seen on North Rona (Outer Hebrides) on 6th June. In Lothian at least nine different **Spoonbills** were seen in May and June. The **Snowy Egret** was last reported at Loch Feochan (Argyll) on 7th June. Amongst its allies, three **Great White Egrets** were seen in May and June on Orkney, Shetland and Argyll; a **Purple Heron** over Penderry Hill on 4th May will be the first Ayrshire record if accepted; two **Black Storks** were reported in May in Highland and Aberdeenshire; and 15+ **Common Cranes** included at least two summering birds on Shetland. Three **White-billed Divers** were seen in May and June on Shetland (two) and Highland. A **Pied-billed Grebe** spent the afternoon of 6th May at Harrow Harbour – the first Caithness record and unusual for the species to be on the sea. Raptor highlights included four **Black Kites** in May and June in Lothian (two), Highland and Outer

Common Crane, Burrafirth, July 2002. (Hugh Harrop/Shetland Wildlife)

Hebrides, and a first-summer male **Montagu's Harrier** on Fair Isle on 21st-25th (found dead on the last date) was only the second island record after one in 1992. Four **Ring-necked Ducks** included one summering at Loch Leven (Kinross), whilst two **King Eiders** were seen – a drake in Argyll from April until 13th May, and the regular female in the Firth of Forth. A **Black Duck** at Loch of Hillwell on 13th-24th May was only the second record for Shetland.

Also on Shetland, a first-summer **Ross's Gull** was at Loch of Tingwall on 10th-28th May. While observers down south struggled with the identification of various orange-billed terns, the three rare terns seen in Scotland were much more straightforward with an adult **White-winged Black Tern** at Loch an Tiumpan, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 12th-18th May, a **Gull-billed Tern** briefly on the Ythan Estuary on 19th May (first for Aberdeenshire) and a **Caspian Tern** at Skinflats on 9th July (first for Upper Forth). It was a good skua passage this year off the Outer Hebrides with more than 2,300 **Pomarine Skuas** and 680 **Long-tailed Skuas** logged passing the Aird an Runair headland, North Uist in May with peak counts of 934 **Pomarines** on 14th and 450 **Long-taileds** on 25th. Unusually, six **Sabine's Gulls** were reported from North and South Uist during the last five days of May, with an adult reported off Barns Ness (Lothian) on 29th July. An adult **Black-browed Albatross** was seen from a cruise boat between Boreray and Hirta on St Kilda on 12th June (is it on a gannetry out there?) whilst a **"Soft-plumaged" Petrel**, presumably a **Fea's Petrel**, flew south past North Ronaldsay on 28th July – a long expected and predicted first land-based report for Scotland. The only other Scottish record is of one at sea 130km off Unst in June 1996. These were certainly the star seabird reports although two **Cory's Shearwaters** were seen in July off Fraserburgh (Aberdeenshire) on 21st and a lingering individual for the fourth year running off Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on 20th-24th.

Rare waders in the period were just that, with the **Greater Yellowlegs** first seen in April again on St Kilda on 8th-10th May and presumably the same bird at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 11th-14th May (second Argyll record), a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** at Loch Paible, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 8th-9th June, and an adult **Pacific Golden Plover** on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 8th-9th July. Two scarce waders in May proved incredibly popular,

Kentish Plover, Aberlady Bay, May 2002. (Harry Scott)

namely a female **Kentish Plover** at Aberlady Bay on 11th-14th (fifth Lothian record) and a **Stone Curlew** which spent the day of the 28th in a field at Blackdog, the first record for Aberdeenshire. This bird had been colour-ringed as a chick on the Wiltshire/Hampshire border on 26th July 2001. Elsewhere amongst scarcer waders there was a great showing by **Little Ringed Plovers** with seven seen in May, including singles on Orkney and Shetland and the first record for Speyside near Boat of Garten on 10th. In a record-breaking showing, at least five breeding pairs were reported in Scotland this year with proof of successful breeding in the form of family parties in July at Kingston (Moray) and RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (Aberdeenshire).

Into August, during the first week a party of three **Bee-eaters** was seen over Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 4th with presumably the same party seen in Aberdeenshire on 7th. A **White-winged Black Tern** was at Aberdeen on 4th. A **Barred Warbler** on Unst, the first of the year, on 4th really signalled the start of autumn proper, the time when keen observers get that tingle of expectation!

Angus Murray, BirdLine Scotland

Stone Curlew, Blackdog, May 2002. (Harry Scott)

Next *Scottish Bird News*

Contributions for the next issue of *SBN*, due in December, should be submitted to the SBN Editor, SOC, Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh EH21 6SJ, no later than 18th October. We still welcome typed or handwritten articles. Electronic material (written, photographs and artwork) can be sent on disc or e-mail to: mail@the-soc.org.uk.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

Now, 66 years on, in 2002, the Club has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. ***www.the-soc.org.uk***

Passwords to access members' web pages: 'Tree' & 'Sparrow'

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